

*Elijah fed by Ravens.*

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A  
S E R M O N  
PREACHED  
AT THE  
NEW JERUSALEM TEMPLE,  
IN RED-CROSS-STREET,  
NEAR CRIPPLEGATE, LONDON,  
March 13, 1796=40,  
On I KINGS XVII. 6, 7.

AND THE RAVENS BROUGHT HIM BREAD AND FLESH IN  
THE MORNING, AND BREAD AND FLESH IN THE EVEN-  
ING: AND HE DRANK OF THE BROOK. AND IT CAME  
TO PASS AFTER A WHILE, THAT THE BROOK DRIED UP,  
BECAUSE THERE HAD BEEN NO RAIN IN THE LAND.

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BY MANOAH SIBLY, N.H.S.  
AND SERVANT OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

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## SERMON IX.

### ELIJAH FED BY RAVENS.

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I KINGS XVII. 6, 7.

*And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening: and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.*

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**W**HEN a serious mind reflects upon the glory of the Word, viewing it not only containing a natural, but also internal senses, till the Lord is seen alone in every part, it cannot but prize the least tittle or iota in which such wonderful lustre is displayed; and more especially when it is known, that all things laid down therein contain pre-

cepts and instructions in regard to the welfare of our eternal state, when this mortal shall have put on immortality, and we no longer subject to the laws of time and place, but of eternity and state.

This passage before us contains many useful and important truths, as well in it's natural as in it's spiritual ground.

In the literal sense it manifests the care, love, wisdom, and providence of the Lord, in supplying food for the natural support of his creatures; and we are hereby taught, that, whilst we are in the way of our duty, (as was the case of Elijah before us) we may expect a supply of natural things, and such a supply as our heavenly Father sees best for the furtherance and cherishing the spark of life divine and salvation in our souls.

It is true this may not at all times amount to our wishes; but we ought to remember, that he who feeds the ravens that cry, who clothes the grass of the field, who ornaments  
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the caterpillars, to whom belongs the cattle upon a thousand hills; nay, the world and the fulness thereof, in all his providences which respect our bodies, places his especial eye on the soul; there is the first concern of the Lord in his regard to us as his creatures, and to the body only so far as it may be subservient to the uses of the soul; and we are commanded to follow his example in so many express words, when he says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added."

In the next place, the words of our text may also lead our minds to the means which the Lord makes use of to support the church generally, and also the life of God in the soul of the individual, when no other will do, which are sometimes the most unlikely, the very enemies of the church, and to the flourishing of the life of God in the soul, being made subservient to effect that which is against their very nature. It is the nature of ravens to live upon flesh; and yet here we find, in the statement of the historic fact before us, that they brought it to Elijah, and they brought it

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it to him, because the famine was in the land, and there was no sustenance to be procured in the city.

The reflection that follows is, that the Lord brings the greatest possible good out of the greatest evil; nay, that he turns all evil into good, all the evil that wicked men or devils may design against his church in general, or against the progress of the life of God in the soul, into good, in the establishment and confirmation of the principles and practice of what is good and true.

Thus the Lord has gone on counteracting the designs of hell with regard to the fall of every church, in making it thereby an opportunity to establish his kingdom at large upon a firmer foundation, that at length he might establish his New Jerusalem dispensation amongst men, in a church never more to decay.

The Lord exercises his omniscience and providence the same in the case of every individual in all his falling states, from infancy  
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to adult age, laying a basis for celestial and spiritual loves, the Lord taking the opportunity so to operate from the states of evil, into which man gradually declines from birth, in order that when the age of maturity arrives, there may be a series of steps or a ladder in the mind whereby he may advance from the lowest to the highest, and at length seated as near his Maker as it is possible for a creature to be.

These truths open to us from the appearance of our text in it's natural sense; in the spiritual sense we behold another face, to comprehend which we must have recourse to the general connection and series in which these words are spoken.

In the first place, we have to consider that the person who was thus fed was the prophet Elijah, who, in common with all the prophets of the Old Testament, were representatives; when pronouncing, "Thus saith Jehovah to the people," representing the Lord, and when commanded by the Lord to act any part, to perform any particular transaction,

tion, representing the state of the church, then only in the world with the people of the Jews, and also the state of the Word, that is, the state of the understanding and affection existing with the church for the goods and truths of the Word; on which occasions they were often addressed by the name, Son of Man.

This accounts for the many otherwise singular transactions which they were ordered to accomplish; as for instance, when the prophet Hosea was commanded to take a wife of whoredom, and children of whoredom, in that instance we have the reason given, for the land had committed great whoredom in departing from the Lord. The prophet Ezekiel was also ordered to bake a cake with man's dung; also he was commanded to lay a number of days on one side, and then a number on the other, bearing the iniquity of the house of Israel, representing their iniquitous state, for he could bear it in no other way by that transaction. The Lord himself also, the represented prophet, is often called the Son of Man on the same account,



account, and is said to bear the iniquities of the people exactly upon the same ground, fully representing the quality of love and faith of the Jewish church, the love at that period being all selfish and worldly, and the faith all found in falshood; thereby the Word was crucified between two thieves, from whence by correspondence they also crucified the Lord.

Every church, which has hitherto existed in the world, has had it's state of beginning, progress, and decline. The Jewish church had this also in common with others: being the last which immediately preceded our Lord's advent, it was the lowest of any church which existed before it; yea, so low, that it never was any real church at all, but only the representative of one; the Lord, as before hinted, not being able to create a creature without a possibility of his falling; but at the same time making use of that fall as subservient to his grand design of establishing his kingdom finally upon a firm foundation, and of coming into the ultimates of his own creation, uniting that to himself

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which was originally from him and with him in the beginning, when (Elohim) God created the heavens and the earth, but which afterwards became separated by the fall.

The state now represented by Elijah was, when there was neither dew nor rain in the land, as in the beginning of this chapter. The passage is worth our attention. "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word;" where from it's being said that there shall not be dew nor rain *these years*, is evident that it refers to the whole state of the Jewish church, from the beginning to the ending, years meaning states, and these years the whole states. All the states of the Jewish church were such in general, as where there was neither dew nor rain in the land, the dew and rain referring to the genuine goods and truths of the Word, causing the soul who receives it to bring forth good fruit, to the honour and glory of his Maker. This is the rain with which



which the Lord refreshes his inheritance when it is weary. This is the dew descending from Hermon's hill, causing the soul to fructify in all good, and to multiply in all truth.

In the Jewish church throughout, from beginning to end, there was neither dew nor rain; they were not even the representative of a church, until entirely vastated of every internal principle of good and truth that could form a real church; the Lord choosing them before all others, to keep up the representation of a church, as the last stage of forming the grand man, as to the feet and soles of the feet, necessary to exist before he came himself; because thereby, if we may so express ourselves, creation was made fully ripe to bring forth her divine guest, who would unite the lowest with the highest. The Lord chose the people of the Jews before all others for this purpose, not because, as Moses told them, they were better than other people, for they were as abominable a race of men as any under heaven; but because the Lord foresaw that he could make their ob-

stinacy and perverseness, their stiff-neckedness, subservient to his grand design, of keeping open the communication between the heavens and the earth, by their observance of external rites and ceremonies, which should represent the divine spiritual and celestial things which were in the heavens, at the same time having no knowledge whatever what their external worship represented; but by this the Lord united heaven and earth, until his advent. Therefore, *these years*, all the time of the Jewish dispensation, there was no rain nor dew.

This accounts for, and reconciles many apparent improprieties in the Jewish history. For instance, they being permitted to have more wives than one, which is not lawful for a christian, because the christian is capable of undergoing a state of regeneration, and this would be an insuperable bar; but it was allowed them for the sake of the representation, that various affections might be united under one spiritual truth. It was the same also in regard to their concubines, affections in subordination being represented.

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From this we may reconcile why the children of Israel were permitted to rob the Egyptians at their going out of Egypt, the Israelites representing the goods and truths of faith, and the Egyptians the things of science, which it is lawful for the spiritual man to make use of, to confirm and strengthen the goods and truths of faith; not that the act is to be justified, for on their part it was wicked; but it is recorded for the sake of the representation, and also shews us the genius of that people, who thought not of the robbery as a crime.

The same we may say of the failings recorded of David, who, as a representative of the Lord, is called the man after God's own heart; but as a representative of the church, a polygamist, a murderer, and adulterer.

The same also with Solomon, who, as a representative of the Lord, is called the wisest of men; but as to his own private life, was a vile abandoned man.

It may here be necessary to observe, that  
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the private character of those recorded in the Word, whether good or bad, is out of our consideration; it is what we have nothing to do with; it is nothing to us who or what the man was that the Lord made use of as the instrument to bring down himself in his Word to man upon earth; indeed, in some respects, coming ultimately through an impure conduit, it may be the more adapted to our impure state of reception; but still it derogates not from the authenticity, the power and glory of his Word: for we know the wicked high-priest prophesied that it was expedient that one man should die for the nation, that the whole people perish not; and this not from his own state, but from his office, the same as all the prophets and apostles spoke and wrote the whole of the Word.

That a famine, in respect to which the words of our text are applicable, means a deficiency or want of spiritual goods and truths, which can alone nourish and support the soul, is evident from many passages in the Word, more particularly from Amos, chap.



chap. viii. ver. 11. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine for bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the Word of the Lord; and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, to seek the Word of the Lord, and shall not find it: in that day shall the fair virgins and young men fail for thirst."

Having thus traced the representation of Elijah in the subject of our text, the nature of the Jewish church, and of the famine which was then in the land, we now come immediately to the text itself, where we read of the prophet, that the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening.

The word translated raven, alludes to all sorts of night birds. Birds in general, in the spiritual sense, allude to the things of man's understanding; because, in order of creation, they are produced from man's intellectual principle, as beasts are from his will. As clean, useful, and tame beasts flow from,  
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and consequently represent a will replenished with what is good from the Lord; and unclean, noxious, and wild beasts a will filled with evils from hell: so clean, tame, and useful fowls or birds flow from and represent an understanding replenished with truths from the Lord; and unclean, noxious, and wild fowls and birds an understanding filled with falses from hell. As all night birds are of the latter kind, therefore they are correspondences of the fallacious appearance of things which exist before the sight of the natural man, which fallacies, if he confirms them in himself, become falses, and infallibly lead to the bottomless pit.

That this is the state of the natural man, that these birds of night, as well as beasts of prey, are correspondences to his state; yea more, that they flow from his state, evil within man being the only origin of all evil around him of every kind, will be made fully apparent from Isaiah, chap. xxxiv. ver. 11, 12, &c. where the Word, speaking of the natural or unregenerate man, under the name of Idumea, says, "But the cormorant  
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and the bittern shall possess it, the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it, and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness: they shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there, and all her princes shall be nothing: and thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof; and it shall be an habitation for dragons, and a court for owls: the wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech-owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest: there shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow; there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate." A horrid description of hell, which hell man is of himself, more especially in his unregenerate state, a nest of wild and ravenous beasts, a cage of unclean and ravenous birds, beasts of prey, and birds of night.

This was the case of the Jewish church from it's commencement, as well as of every

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unregenerate man under heaven. Here he may say, looking into his own soul, The famine is in the land:—he is in a wilderness. It is true, in christendom he is by the brook, because he possesses the Word. What are his companions? Not the dove, but the raven; the screech-owl, and every bird of night, occupy the understanding, as beasts of prey occupy the night. What are these birds of night, but all the fallacies of the natural man? and all he knows, all he sees, are such, because he is not able to elevate his mind above the effects which alone operate upon the senses, in which every thing is fallacious; he cannot elevate his mind to causes, in and from whence alone things can truly be seen as to the genuine state of the case; which indeed is the essential difference between a genuine truth and an apparent one, the genuine truth being seen as the cause, and the apparent as the effect; the former also being a spiritual truth, the latter a natural one. All genuine spiritual truths are in the day and light, whilst all apparent natural truths are in the night and shade; but which may be removed by a life conscientiously to that shade;



shade; for man in every state, whilst in the life of the body, may rise to higher degrees if he acts from conscience according to his present light; then the light may shine in darkness, and the darkness comprehend it, but not otherwise, because else, however the light may shine in darkness, the darkness comprehendeth it not.

These ravens brought bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening. By morning and evening is meant the beginning and ending of the church; the morning the beginning, and the evening the ending, or more properly the time of visitation preceding the end or night.

By the bread and the flesh we are to understand that which the natural man appropriates to himself as his food, or that in which he delights as his good. To the pure all things are pure; whilst to the man who is impure, that is, wallowing in his sins, all things are impure, his own defiled heart contaminating the influx in it's entrance into his soul: hence his bread and flesh is quite op-

posite to the bread and flesh of the regenerate man. The bread of those who are born of God is to love the Lord with all their heart and soul, mind and strength; their meat, to love their neighbour as themselves; or as our Lord says, who set us an example, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work; this bread and this meat is not introduced into the soul by birds of night; it is not the food that ravens bring; the bread and meat they bring are in direct opposition; they lead the man to center in self, instead of looking to the Lord, and to attend to the things of the world in preference to the things of heaven and the church, which is his neighbour.

The effects of each food are also widely different; for as appropriating the love of the Lord to ourselves introduces life and salvation into the soul, so the appropriation of the love of self introduces death, spiritual death, and all it's woes. Hence, in allusion to this being the state of the Jewish church, that the ravens fed them with this soul-killing food, our Lord tells them, "Ye are



are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye will do;" and also, "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead;" and then speaking of the blessed nature of the opposite food, he says, "I am the bread of life, he that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth in me shall never thirst."

We may also instance the same with respect to meat and it's appropriation, as the love of heaven or the love of the world. When the Lord sent quails round the encampments of the Israelites in the wilderness, to satisfy their lusts, after eating of that meat, some thousands of them died, because it represented the appropriation of the love of the world. But our Lord declares, with respect to appropriation of spiritual love from him, "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day, for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed; he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him."

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Our text further says of Elisha, as representative of the Jewish church, and at the same time of every man born in the pale of the church, that he drank of the brook, the brook meaning the Word, which is a fountain, water, a river, springs, brook, or brooks, with relation to the truths it contains, being like an endless, flowing stream, at which each one may drink and satisfy his thirst; this the bad, as well as the good, are equally capable of doing; the literal sense of the Word being accommodated to the natural man, but within these natural truths are spiritual ones, as jewels within a casket, unto which the natural man may be elevated, whilst he is faithful to the natural duties he is called to perform, and abstains from evils because they are sins against God; and this sense is in the letter as the soul within the body, as the cause within the effect. Those who are fed by ravens, can alone appropriate the natural truths of the Word, which are all written according to appearances, because they speak as effects appear; the others they cannot appropriate. If they should see a genuine truth, it is because they have,



have, like a bird of wing, elevated their understanding for some time-serving purpose, and when that is answered, they descend again to their own right state, as if they had never known otherwise.

The difference between the man who acts conscientiously, and the man who does not, allowing both at present to see no further than the literal sense of the Word, is this; the former reads the Word, attends upon preachings therefrom, and other spiritual duties, that he may know his Maker's will in order to do it; whilst the latter reads the Word, and attends to other helps for understanding it, in order to get a form of doctrines into his head; and as for want of a good life, he cannot see any genuine truth therein, he takes up the apparent truths to himself, and however foolish, (as the Lord himself calls the man, who heard the Word and did it not) however infatuated the idea, conceives that at last he shall be saved by faith alone; that is, he shall be accepted by God the Father for the merits of Christ; forgetting to vivify the internal, either by love to God or man, which cannot be

be whilst man abides in a self-sufficient state; for they are so blinded as to every divine knowledge, that they know not, nor are willing to know, that Jesus Christ is the alone God of heaven and earth, but some other impersonal God, a phantom floating in the imagination, which is in reality no God at all.

This was the case of the Jews; they worshipped Jehovah, it is true; but they knew nothing of him but the name, and at length, as an emblem that the church in name also was dried up, that they were no longer the representative one, they ceased to utter the word Jehovah at all, neither do they pronounce it at this day in public or private.

We might here notice the evening, in respect to individuals, as the end of the life in the body, as the morning alludes to the beginning of the same; under which view a solemn thought impresses the mind with respect to those who have not suffered the Lord in time to regenerate them by his Word and spirit, who, although they have the brook  
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to drink of in the way, walk counter to it's instructions; their state is denoted in the latter part of our text, "And it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land."

The time of life is the time for us to choose our eternal state in heaven or hell, whether we will serve the Lord or no. It becomes us to remember, that every moment we live in the body is a mercy, and a mercy because we may improve it to the salvation of our souls; if not, in another life the brook will be dried up, the day of mercy will be past, for as the tree falls, so it lies, and lies for ever.

Now to our Lord Jesus Christ be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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10 JY 60



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